

## **INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY RIGHTS SEEN AS KEY TO ECONOMIC PROGRESS**

**WASHINGTON, MARCH 21** -- Countries that protect intellectual property rights (IPR) in today's world are better situated to support creativity and benefit economically, says Thomas G. Field Jr., law professor and IPR expert at the Franklin Pierce Law Center, New Hampshire.

In a webchat March 17, Field said: "As the world shrinks, countries increasingly need to decide whether they want to limit themselves to low-margin raw materials or to share in markets for high-margin finished goods. If the latter, they need to create a legal infrastructure [for IPR] to support the needed intellectual infrastructure."

As an example of the value of IPR to an economy, Field discussed the creation and manufacture of clothing, which he said is perceived as "more useful" than raw cotton. According to Field, patent protection -- one of the leading forms of IPR -- encourages creative individuals to devise improved equipment and processes "to make production and distribution cheaper."

"That, in turn, makes finished clothes available to more people at lower cost." Countries that export these cheaper, better-quality finished goods usually outpace those that export just raw materials, such as cotton, Field said.

Field said that IPR itself has changed as new production means are developed. "Copyright had little use before the creation of the printing press," he said. But he said as technology for distributing information has changed, the law has adapted to meet new challenges. "The worldwide web," he added, "has resulted in a need to protect domain names lest consumers be defrauded by people pretending to be someone they are not."

The goal of IPR -- "to encourage the creation of new goods and services to make people's lives more pleasant in all respects" -- has remained constant throughout changes and innovations, Field said.

Asked whether the folk traditions of a country can be protected under copyright, Field saw problems with protecting traditional works. First, copyrights expire at some point -- usually a certain number of years after the death of the author or artist, he said.

According to Field, that raises a second issue: Who was the author? Was there one or many who added bits and pieces over a long time? "And, of course," he concluded, "part of the last issue is who owns or can enforce the copyright? A village, a tribe or some other identifiable group?"

The transcript (<http://usinfo.state.gov/usinfo/Archive/2006/Mar/17-873358.html>) of the webchat is available on USINFO's Webchat Station (<http://usinfo.state.gov/usinfo/Products/Webchats.html>).

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